

***Teaching Culture in Spanish Language Classes:  
A methodological and reflective exploration***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Although it is generally accepted that language and culture are fundamentally inseparable, most high-school world-language classrooms remain primarily grammar-oriented and culture deficient (Hendon, 1992). In grammar-focused classroom environments, culture tends to be treated as a tool to teach language. The present study traces the history of culture instruction in secondary education and reports on data from an innovative classroom intervention. Specifically, changes over time in pedagogical approaches to culture and grammar methods serve as the backdrop for an empirical study carried out with beginning and intermediate learners of Spanish. Participants ( $n = 47$ ) were undergraduates enrolled in SP102, SP201, and SP202 courses at a large, Midwestern university (whose level of Spanish is not vastly different from more advanced high school learners) who completed three surveys (pre, immediate post, and delayed [one-month] post-surveys) after taking part in a 50-minute intervention that integrated grammatical and cultural elements. Analyses include how changes over time in students' attitudes are affected by gender, class standing, and the change over time of students' attitudes towards the importance of culture. Results showed that the majority of data was inconclusive due to a small sample size and missing data. The only significant conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that gender does seem to affect the way a student views culture, as females believed that culture was more important than males. In addition to sharing the details of the methodology and results, there will also be a discussion of future directions for research and practice in world language classrooms that could help students and future teachers (in Spanish and perhaps other languages, too) have a sharper understanding of how and why having authentic culture activities in the world language classroom is important.

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### Process-Analysis Statement

I started this project with very little prior knowledge about cultural education; my Spanish education seemed to be lacking in that department. After spending most of my high school career learning Spanish culture from a textbook, getting bits of information about holidays, foods, and dance styles, and rare opportunities to do something to explore other perspectives, I realized there were hardly any real-world contexts or applications. Like many, I sat in ignorance, happy with what I was doing and what I was learning, until my first Spanish linguistics class in college. In this class, among other things, we studied sentence structures and how they related to different Spanish-speaking countries and regional varieties. Learning about multiple Spanish accents was fascinating along with how much variation in word choice and grammar there also was.

Thankfully, I am not only a Spanish major but also an Education major. One day, in one of my education classes, we learned about the importance of big "C" and little "c" culture. I then realized that often in high school Spanish classes, educators teach little "c" culture, which is normally focused on music, dancing, art, literature, or food, and what was missing was the big "C" culture. This highlights behavioral characteristics, such as the way people communicate, personal space, and discourse markers. This was it. I had been missing all this information, and it spurred me to further investigate cultural education in world language classrooms. Through research and the lesson that I created for this thesis, I have learned so much about the importance of culture itself and cultural education.

Throughout my research, I discovered a lot about second language acquisition (SLA) and how it has changed over the years. It was incredibly interesting and will help me in the future as

a Spanish teacher. One of the first things that I discovered was that culture does not have one single definition because it is so influential in life. It is not a laundry list of facts but rather has a strong link in many aspects of human life. It influences an individual's behavior (e.g., actions, reactions, gestures, the way one talks, and where one stands), and it even shapes attitudes and beliefs. Cultural norms have a tremendous influence on a person's life and decisions and are not something that can be taught in bits and pieces to second language (L2) learners. I had no idea how all-encompassing it could be. Once I realized how influential and important culture is, it fueled me to learn as much as I could so that I could change how culture is taught.

Over the course of my last three semesters, I have studied many of the major world language teaching methods and theories and realized that a lack of cultural authenticity is an age-old issue. There has yet to be a method that is culturally centered in both theory and practice. Since the 1500s, students have generally been passive learners of vocabulary and grammar with little room for anything else. Teachers have assumed the role of authority, the expert, and the central person who gives the knowledge to the student. Students have almost always been a receptive audience. This type of teaching led to the Atlas Complex. As Lee and VanPatten (1995) explained, like the titan Atlas from Greek mythology, who supported the heavens on his shoulders, instructors assume full responsibility for all that goes on in the classroom. When everything is completely reliant on one person, there is bound to be information lost, forgotten, or cut; traditionally, the lost information is culture. When I first learned about the Atlas Complex, I thought that it was incredibly unrealistic. I scoffed at the teachers who acted that way. But that all changed when I started my student teaching.



Now that I am aware how the Atlas Complex functions in practice, I have started to realize that it is a lot more common. This semester as part of my student teaching for high school Spanish students, I have to analyze my teaching style. A few weeks ago, after taking over the class, I noticed that I tend to lean more to the Atlas side of things. For example, I like to give my students the tools and then let them use the tools to build their own knowledge rather than letting them find the tools on their own. When it comes to grammar concepts, recently, I have been lecturing and giving them the information that I think they need to know, followed by activities that I created where they use the information that I gave them. It is not necessarily a good, co-constructive environment because my students do not often have opportunities to create their own learning. While I believe that the Atlas Complex is not an ideal way to teach, as it causes unnecessary stress for the teacher and the students are passive in their learning, I now realize that it is overly idealistic to believe that one can teach without having an Atlas-like approach at some point.

Recently, SLA theorists have shown that students need authentic experiences (Culture) and comprehensible input and output to best acquire the language. It is not enough to focus on grammatical drills and repeat them over and over, like the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM: explained further in literature review.) SLA is not all about habit formation and translation, and while there is a time and a place for them, speaking the language is what will help one acquire it the most. There should be room for error, and students should take an active role in their own learning because both are imperative to the SLA process. Students cannot sit idly by and do rote memorization activities. They need the opportunity to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning in real-life situations. Once the field realized how important meaningful interactions

were, the Communicative Language Approach became popular in the early 1970s. It took nearly 500 years for research to finally focus on contextualized input. This approach advocates for contextualized information through real-life scenarios, appealing topics, functional grammar usage (i.e., grammar that will help one to speak in social situations), and an emphasis on communication instead of solely on grammatical accuracy. Language developed as a way for people to function in cultural situations. We do not learn languages to be more academic and grammatically correct. Rather, we learn languages to be able speak with other people, and I would argue, to experience another's culture.

However, as I started to look at more recent research and not just theories, I realized that grammar-centered classrooms are still popular today. Teachers list a variety of reasons as to why many of them feel like Atlas and do not focus on culture. They claim that there is simply not enough space in the curriculum for a deeper exploration of Culture. This causes students to miss a fundamental part of their L2 education. As Cutshall (2012) said, "there is no true communication without some demonstration of cultural knowledge and sensitivity" (p. 37). I agree with Cutshall that there is no way one can understand and acquire a language without an understanding of the culture.

Many teachers also commented that they lack authentic materials and training in cultural education. In the study done by Castro (2004), researchers tried to find out teachers' current ideas regarding cultural education in world language classrooms. These teachers claimed that they lacked necessary authentic resources (e.g., items or oral communications produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group) that would aid in creating a good contextualized lesson. They also realized that



culture does not stay constant but rather is subject to an ever-changing process. Therefore, the few materials that they may have (e.g., a textbook) may be outdated and the information no longer relevant. While I believe that it is unrealistic to completely contextualize every instance in the classroom, I think that some teachers use this as an excuse. It is easy in our digital world to find resources. Clearly, not all people are comfortable or experienced with technology, but there are other ways to find resources (e.g., libraries, co-workers, native speakers). However, I understand why teachers mentioned, in Castro's study, that they felt unconfident in their own abilities to teach culture. Many, non-native speakers, do not feel comfortable educating their students about another culture, even though they might have lived in that culture for a time. This makes perfect sense to me because I feel the same way. Although, I lived in Spain for three months, to say that I can teach their culture to students does not seem entirely plausible. As I only lived there for three months, I do not believe that I could say I learned everything about the culture. I feel that I could only share a small amount of it. However, I do not think that this means that teachers should give up. It would be a great professional development opportunity to take classes or to study abroad again.

I truly think that studying abroad is the ultimate way to gain authentic resources, opportunities, and knowledge. While immersing myself in Segovia, Spain, I collected a lot of books, pictures, and trinkets that I can use to teach culture in my classroom, but I also had many experiences with local people that will help me to teach Culture as well. I was a part of the culture and learned by doing, which allowed me to gain authentic experiences that I will share with my future students. I studied the similarities between our cultures in addition to

differences, and I think that (in addition to creating more authentic experiences) is how I will teach culture in my classroom.

Once I become more comfortable with teaching culture in my classes, I would also like to try a more recent teaching method called Project-Based learning (PBL). This method is a great way to give students an authentic, contextualized, language learning experience. As will be described in the literature review, PBL helps students to gain knowledge and skills by working together to explore and respond to authentic, complex, and challenging issues. This is a complete turnaround from the teacher-centered methods of instruction of the 1500s. It is a student-centered approach that has proven to help students acquire deeper knowledge through an active exploration of real-world experiences. Students become active in their own learning, which is one of the best ways to implement culture into the classroom without using a textbook. Although PBL in theory is a great method, I also believe that it is entirely too idealistic for many high school contexts because it runs against the current of standard educational practices nowadays. In the current generation, students are trained to take exams. They are taught to be receptacles of knowledge, not to create their own learning. In PBL, the students do almost everything by themselves. They have to make their own schedules and be responsible for their own work. While they create their own learning, many of them could miss the important content knowledge. In theory, PBL is a good way to make the classroom more authentic but one cannot leave out content or grammar, which I think is one of the most important lessons that I have learned while writing this thesis. There needs to be a balance between authentic cultural experiences and grammar. I believe that would be the ideal classroom.



Since there are not many studies conducted on the topic of cultural education in Spanish classrooms, I created a study that helped me to see how students' perspectives/attitudes on culture change over time, how past experiences with Spanish have influenced their current perspectives, and how well students retain cultural information from a specific method. My study included three groups of participants who were all undergraduate students studying Spanish at various levels (102, 201, and 202). I chose these classes because they would most likely be at the same level as those in a high school. I used a series of voluntary Qualtrics surveys (a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest) that invited the students to answer questions about their past experiences in Spanish, their perspectives on culture, their thoughts on immigration, and their thoughts on what they learned from certain activities in the intervention. I believe that using an online survey was a good way to collect the data that I needed, as it was the most efficient way to obtain a larger sample size for my research questions. Having three surveys helped me to see a progression of perspectives over time.

The lesson started with the Diversity Activity, which consisted of a series of sentences written in Spanish, designed to help the students see the diversity among them. I did something like this in a class in high school, and it made me realize that we do not all have the same life experiences; our environment and experiences contribute heavily to who we are today. We all have different experiences, and I think that it is incredibly important to point that out occasionally. I wanted to do this in this lesson to remind students just how diverse they are and also prepare them for the rest of the intervention.

The next step in the intervention was the introduction of the song *Somos Más Americanos*. After listening to the song, they got into small groups and each group researched a topic of investigation or reflection based on the song. I loved this portion of the intervention. I designed these topics of investigation to hopefully broaden their perspective on current immigration issues. Two of the topics prompted the students to look up the history behind a few of the lyrics that served as a powerful reminder that life was not always the way that we thought it was (as will be explained in greater detail in the Methods section). What many people may not know is that, before the War of 1865, Mexico used to be nearly twice as big as it is now. In the war, the U.S. won eight states from Mexico: California, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and parts of Colorado. Many Mexican people continued to live there after the “border” was created. Technically, they were there first. This song’s theme is that the people who still live there of Mexican origin are technically more American than the Americans living there now, thus the immigrant role is reversed. The first time I heard this song I was completely caught off guard. It totally changed my perspective on immigration. Many of them were similarly surprised when exposed to this historical perspective. Most students had no idea what had happened in the war. After investigating these topics, they had both sides of the story. I pictured it this way, these students have been living with only half of a picture, and they found the second half by exploring authentic resources. They then saw the whole picture and could share that picture and educate other people.

Although many students came to the same conclusions, each time I taught the lesson, it went differently. Each class had its own personality, which is something that I have learned through student teaching as well. However, I was surprised to find that the intervention in SP



102 went the best. In that class, there were only 8 students, which was incredibly disappointing at first. I should not have picked to go to that class on the Friday before fall break, but this class was the most interactive. I had to change a lot of the intervention to make it work for a smaller class, and in turn, I think that is what made it so successful. It was easier for a smaller group of people to share their perspectives and dig deep into the topics. This class had a very basic level of Spanish, and so we had many of the conversations in English. At first, that bothered me, but now looking back, I think that it was beneficial. They grasped the important concepts, and I do not think that would have happened had I forced them to speak only in Spanish. It was a much more meaningful conversation the way we did it.

Although there were meaningful interactions in all the classes, I was disappointed with the results of my study because I had hoped for a larger sample size and less attrition in the responses. Due to a smaller sample size and more than 20% missing data in the second and third surveys, almost all of my results had to be strictly descriptive analyses rather than more generalizable (inferential) analyses. I had really hoped that I would be able to tell if the students' perceptions and attitudes had changed toward culture over time. Unfortunately, however, the only conclusion that I could draw is that there is a positive trend in the data. It is probable that, with a larger sample size, once students are immersed in a more culture-centered classroom, their perceptions and attitudes about culture will change, thus creating more culturally tolerant people as opposed to culturally bound people. Another important piece of data that I noticed was how gender affected their views on the importance of culture: More females said that it was more important to learn about culture than males.

In sum, I learned a lot from my project. I started with the idea that I wanted to find a way to implement more authentic cultural lessons into the Spanish language classroom and create a method that would help students to retain and use the cultural information, but my idea morphed into something much greater. I now want to show educators, students like me, or anyone that will listen, how important culture is. I want people to realize that although, right now, culture tends to be taught as a vehicle to move language; I believe that it should be the other way around. Teachers should use language as a vehicle to teach culture, and students should be empowered to take an active role in their learning.

### **Introduction**

World language educators have fairly recently recognized that language and culture are fundamentally inseparable, rather than two different fields, but they are interrelated and affect each other mutually. Gleason (1961) said that “languages are not only the products of cultures but also are the symbols of cultures” (p. 2). One could also conceive of this relationship as such: the development of a language can affect its associated cultures, but also cultural patterns are often encoded in language. Due to the inevitable interrelatedness between culture and language, it follows that learning another language will also involve learning about the cultures related to the language. Although many high school world language teachers have accepted this reality in principle, cultural instruction still tends to remain overlooked or forgotten in the classroom. In the present paper, the integration of grammar and cultural education is explored through historical background, current research, and an innovative teaching method. The



following literature review will aid in understanding how and why to implement an authentic culture education in the world language classroom.

## **Background**

### **Culture in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Society at Large**

According to Kramsch (1995), culture has been referred to in at least two different ways to define social communities. The first definition comes from humanities. It emphasizes the way a social group represents itself through material products (e.g., works of art, literature, social institutions, or artifacts of everyday life, and the way they reproduce and preserve their history). The second definition comes from the social sciences and is what many educators call the “ground of meaning” (p. 85); that is attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of that specific community. These definitions have influenced two different approaches to studying culture: the historical and the ethnographic, respectively. The first is based on the written tradition of texts, and the second on observation, data collection, and analysis of mostly oral phenomena: “deriving its authority from the discovery of laws that regulate social life” (p. 85).

These laws are not created by scientists but rather (and sometimes unknowingly) constantly generated by people in everyday life (e.g., discourse rules, personal space norms, eye contact, etc.). They are what distinguishes cultural importance from the natural randomness of the world. Such societal norms allow people to anticipate certain events, and they acquire a moral compass, even a sort of “righteousness” that can provoke stereotypes and prejudices. This “naturalizes” one’s culture and makes one’s own way of thinking, speaking, and behaving seem normal, and other ways of thinking thus seem out of place (Kramsch, 1995).

Because the naturalization of culture makes people believe that other ways of thinking are incorrect, most U.S. students live in a monolingual/monocultural environment, and therefore are considered "culture-bound/culturally-bound." According to Hendon (1992), a culturally-bound person is

someone whose entire view of the world is determined by the value-perspectives he/she has gained through a single cultural environment- who thus cannot understand or accept the point of view of another individual whose values have been determined by a different culture (p. 2).

Hendon argued that the decrease of culturally bound individuals and attitudes should be an important goal of education as a whole. She goes on to show that culturally bound people are more inclined to make premature and inappropriate judgments. For example, someone who was raised to believe that his or her cultural patterns are correct will only believe that someone else's patterns reflect their own or are wrong.

Some students experience culture shock when first introduced to behaviors from other cultures. This may cause them to consider native speakers of that language to be peculiar or poor tempered. For example, personal space among Latin Americans tends to be much smaller than in mainstream U.S. culture where proximity during conversation is generally considered offensive, causing them (North Americans) to back away. The Latin American could then believe that the North American is cold and unfriendly. In U.S. culture, people generally believe that physical contact has sexual connotations. But members of other cultures tend to touch the conversation partner on the arm, or the elbow, or to pat him or her on the shoulder to show affection (Hendon, 1992).

Cultural misinterpretations are one of the biggest issues among youth, and Latorre (1985) identified one of the struggles of cultural education today: Millennials are very sensitive



to the differences between people. He said that “most culture teaching for the purposes of foreign language education is predicated on the assumption that differences are all that matter” (1985, p. 671). He further claimed that differences constitute a real obstacle for learners, and that, in fact, no real-world language education will take place until the learner has been made aware of the differences in beliefs and actions between the target culture and the native culture. Similarly, Cutshall (2012) mentioned that “there is no true communication without some demonstration of cultural knowledge and sensitivity” (p. 32). The constancy of pointing out differences contributes to the perpetuation of cultural misunderstanding and thus leads students (a) to believe that other cultures are much more “foreign” than they are, and (b) to be less likely to be culturally open and sensitive. For example, Latorre commented on Lado’s (1964) piece on bullfighting in which it is presented as an important aspect of the Spanish culture, but Lado mentioned that it contradicts the Anglo-Saxon idea of fair play. Therefore, it is often taught or explained in a way that highlights the barbaric side of bullfighting, instead of the picturesque way that others portray it. The following section will focus upon culture in the world language classroom. It specifically encompasses theories relevant to SLA and world language education.

### **Culture in the World Language Classroom**

The importance of cultural education in the world language classroom has just recently become a concern: “culture is no longer ancillary but rather the core of standards-driven curriculum” (Shrum & Gilsan, 2015, p. 72). In earlier theories (1900s-2000s), teachers solely focused on little bits of textbook information, and learners were supposed to just accept what the teacher told them as facts (Shrum & Gilsan, 2015). Students were extremely passive in the

learning process, especially in the cultural learning process. Most lessons were taught from a linguistic point of view only, without reference to contextualized material. In sum, teachers taught the language, not the culture.

Traditionally, the role that instructors have often assumed is that of the authority, the expert, or the central person in the classroom who gives knowledge to the students (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). Because teachers are the so-called “knowledge transmitters,” the students then become a knowledge-receptive audience. Each role, authoritative transmitter and receptive vessels, entails its own set of specific tasks. For example, the instructor could serve as a lecturer, leader, tutor, or disciplinarian, and the students as note-takers, followers, tutees, or disciplines (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). This method of teaching is known as the “Atlas Complex.” Like the titan Atlas of Greek mythology, who supported the heavens on his shoulders, instructors in this model assume full responsibility for all that goes on in the classroom. In the early 1900s, it used to be that much of the U.S. educational practice reflected the Atlas Complex. A teacher-centered classroom is something that has pervaded over time and through different language instruction methods.

In the earliest formal theories of SLA, teachers focused heavily on the grammar-translation method (GT), which emphasized the study of grammar rules and vocabulary lists so that students could apply the knowledge and then translate classic novels or stories. The GT method is derived from traditional practices of teaching Latin; up until the early 1500s, students learned Latin for communication, but after the language died it was just studied in academic contexts (Bonilla Carvajal, 2013). The target language was rarely spoken, resulting in no opportunities to create authentic cultural contexts.



However, in the 1950s and 1960s, a shift happened and SLA became viewed as the progressive accumulation of good habits, with the goal of error-free production. The learner's first language (L1) was considered a major obstacle to L2 acquisition, as a cause of "interference errors." Theorists believed that this interference produced issues in the process of SLA. They also believed that L2 learning proceeds from "form to meaning;" that is, the learner first mastered all the grammatical forms and structures of the L2 and then moved on to express meaning. The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) grew out of this vision of SLA (Lee & VanPatten, 1995).

With the ALM, the spoken word replaced the literary style, and pattern practice replaced the grammatical explanations (Hendon, 1992). This method emphasized habit formation through oral repetition orally (i.e., repetitious grammar drills, dialogue memorization, etc.). The students listened to the teacher and repeated the correct pronunciation and intonation to make progress with their language skills. To prevent bad habits from forming, they were encouraged not to say anything original that might lead them to produce errors. Rather, new elements were only to be incorporated by students in preplanned structural patterns. The lack of contextualized input and output activities left students ill-prepared to create authentic, spontaneous conversations (Shrum & Gilsan, 2015). This teacher-centered method, the greatest manifestation of the Atlas Complex, was developed at military schools (where no one questioned authority), and the instructor could be described as akin to a drill leader (Lee & VanPatten, 1995).

The next method in language teaching, called the Cognitive Approach, was first proposed in the 1960s and advocated for more meaningful and creative language use (Ausubel,

1968). It is based largely on Chomsky's (1965) claims that an individual's L2 linguistic knowledge does not reflect conditioned behavior but rather the ability to create an infinite number of novel utterances. The Cognitive Approach claimed that, before any L2 student could be expected to perform meaningfully in the language, he or she must understand the rules of that language. This meant that a student should know all the grammatical rules before speaking in the target language. Even though this method advocated for meaningful language use, there was hardly any time to speak the language in a real-world context due to repetitious practice and deep discussion of grammar rules (Shrum & Gilsan, 2015).

In the late 1960s and very early 1970s, some theorists and researchers began to question the established view of language learning as habit formation, therefore questioning ALM. One of the first researchers to question ALM publically was Corder. He opposed the idea that errors should be avoided and are interference from the L1; however, he found that many students produced errors in the SLA process that were not able to be traced back to L1 interference. One of his arguments was that teachers should actually allow learners to produce errors (speaking spontaneously) so that they could be studied to find the origin of the issues (Lee & VanPatten, 1995), thus making them a device that helps students to acquire the language. Through Corder's research on SLA, which at the time had focused primarily on the acquisition of grammar, it was discovered that SLA was not like other kinds of learning and that habit formation theories (i.e., ALM) were inadequate for the SLA process.

Finally, in the 1970s, educators started to give more attention to learners' ability to use the language in realistic contexts as opposed to classroom settings. The Communicative Approach (CA), also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), was a method for



language teaching that emphasized interactions. Previously, it was assumed that students should aim for mastery of the language; however, due to an increased demand in bilingual workers, teachers started to adapt their approaches to focus more on practical application rather than theoretical perfection. They attempted to no longer focus solely on decontextualized grammar drills but rather more on meaningful interactions. This emphasis promotes learners' communicative competence, a concept that stems from Chomsky's idea of linguistic competence. According to Chomsky (1965), linguistic competence refers to knowledge of grammar and of other aspects of languages. However, in the early 1970s, Canale and Swain (1980) commented on Campbell and Wales' (1970) proposal that there is another type of competence called communicative competence. This is not only grammatical or linguistic knowledge but also "contextual or sociolinguistic knowledge (knowledge of use of the language)" (p. 3). Having similar ideas, Savignon (1997) commented on the importance of the CA in the 1970s, stating that:

the development of the learners' communicative abilities is seen to depend not so much on the time they spend rehearsing grammatical patterns as on the opportunities they are given to interpret, to express, and to negotiate meaning in real-life situations. (p. 46)

Savignon also noticed that the communicative abilities of learners developed better when they were given contextualized information for real-life scenarios. Also, she suggested that CA should include appealing topics, functional grammar usage, and an emphasis on communication instead of grammatical accuracy, especially in the initial stages of learning. In this approach, language came to be treated as a tool that learners could use to carry out specific tasks in contextualized situations (Shrum & Gilsan, 2015). This approach shifted the

emphasis to the use of language in cultural situations, and students were considered successful if they could interact appropriately in specific cultural situations.

As CA developed, the roles of instructors and students have changed as well. When instructors shift their roles, so do their students. Whereas the instructor was the so-called knowledge transmitter, the students were the receptacles. Now in the contemporary communicative era, educators incorporate tasks that promote communicative language development; these new types of tasks have initiated a change in the roles of the student and the teacher. The major roles that instructors are beginning to assume are those of resource person and architect (Lee & VanPatten, 1995). An example of the teacher as a resource person in a classroom setting is when he or she explains a new concept, and assumes, unless told otherwise, that he or she should not repeat it; this defeats the Atlas Complex. It is up to the student to decide if there is a lack in comprehension and then notify a teacher when he or she is confused. When the instructor's role becomes that of a resource person, then the students' role transforms into that of gatherers and negotiators of meaning (Lee & VanPatten, 1995).

As instructors' and students' roles started to change, teaching methods continued to evolve. Several of these methods developed in the late 1970s reflect many of Savignon's comments on CA, but there were also other voices that contributed to the dialogue. In 1977, Terrell developed the Natural Approach (NA), which was focused on the idea that L2 learning occurs in the same way that L1 learning does. It emphasizes the importance of authentic language input in real-world contexts, comprehension before production, and self-expression early on (Shrum & Gilsan, 2015). This approach opposes the ideas of the CA (mainly that



students need to learn all the rules first before speaking) and instead advocates for authentic, contextualized input.

Following the same philosophy, the Total Physical Response method (TPR) by Asher, Kusudo, and de la Torre (1974) uses activities directed at the learners' kinesthetic body system (body movements). Learners initially listen to commands that the teacher models in the L2 and respond physically to the commands. For example, if the teacher says to jump, run, or walk to the door in the L2, the students should carry out the action expressed by the command. This method is based on the way that children acquire vocabulary naturally in their L1 through practice and modeling. TPR is often used to teach vocabulary in the L2 and has proven to be effective in the acquisition and retention of L2 vocabulary (Asher et al., 1974).

As approaches like CA and TPR became more accepted in the world language classroom, the type of activities and emphases in textbooks is beginning to be adapted. Starting in the early 1990s teachers began to rely more on textbooks for their classes as a framework for instruction and generally the only source for repetitious grammar exercises and activities. Although there is research in SLA that supports the idea that language learners need opportunities for meaningful interaction, it has still taken time for textbooks to be adapted and rely less heavily on grammar-driven, decontextualized drill activities rather than meaning (Aski, 2003). In more recent versions of world language textbooks, starting around 2010, authors have begun to pay more attention to context, integrating interdisciplinary connections, the exploration of cultural perspectives, and interactions in target language communities into textbooks. In sum, world language education has slowly evolved to include more spontaneous communication and meaningful interactions.

An even more recent teaching method further heightens an atmosphere of L2 cultural exploration, namely, Project Based Learning (PBL). This method is growing in popularity because it allows students to gain knowledge and skills by working together over time to explore and respond to an authentic, complex question, problem, or challenge. Dewey (1897) initially proposed the idea of learning by experience or learning by doing. PBL is a student-centered teaching method that involves a “dynamic classroom approach” in which many believe that students will acquire a deeper knowledge through “active exploration of real-world challenges and problems” (BIE, 2017). PBL opposes the typical paper-based, rote memorization, or teacher-led instruction that just presents already established facts. The main purpose of PBL is to engage students in project-based investigation through authentic experiences.

PBL is backed by research and has proven to be an effective and fun way to learn, but most importantly, it helps develop a deeper learning of the skills required for success in the future (BIE, 2017). Not only does it provide a real-world learning experience but it also promotes the development of collaborative learning. After completing the project, students understand the content more deeply and not only retain it longer than normal instruction, but also can now better apply the knowledge to new situations. Finally, PBL connects students/schools with communities and the real-world. Real-world projects provide students with opportunities to make a difference, by solving real problems or issues in their communities. Students learn how to work with adults and organizations as well as explore their own interests, thus creating a strong connection with their communities (BIE, 2017).

Although some of the more recent methods (i.e., CA, TPR, or NA) promote language learning in cultural contexts, teachers still struggle to create authentic cultural opportunities in



their classrooms. Whereas PBL does assist in creating these opportunities, it is not always feasible. The next section of this paper will explore teachers' claims about the difficulty of teaching culture, why they choose skim over it, and the importance of cultural education in the world language classroom.

### **Current Research**

For a multitude of reasons, culture is a challenging topic to cover in the world language classroom. First, it is an extremely broad term and is therefore difficult to define. According to Seelye (1993), it is a term that covers all aspects of life rather than being a laundry list of facts about music, food, and dance, and it also determines an individual's behavior and language, gestures, manners of greeting. Culture sets boundaries as to what one can do or say in a socially acceptable way.

Due to the extensive range of topics that it covers, culture is often skimmed over in the school systems. In high-school Spanish language classrooms, it is often very difficult for a teacher to implement authentic cultural education. Most teachers just skim the very top level of understanding focusing mostly on culture, which typically includes artifacts like music, food, dancing, etc., as opposed to Culture which highlights more the behavioral cultural traits, such as the way people communicate and personal space (Castro et al., 2004). In the current high-school education system, culture tends to be treated as a laundry list of facts, often not leaving enough space in the curriculum for a more profound exploration of Culture. Although culture has occupied center stage for a long time and we need to integrate Culture more into the language classrooms, it is important to recognize that culture should not go away; culture and Culture are indeed complementary.

With the broad umbrella of Culture, it is understandable why teachers have issues covering it. First, research suggests that personal beliefs reflect teaching practices; for example, Sercu, Méndez García, and Prieto (2005) found that the beliefs of the teacher strongly influenced the content that he or she chooses to cover and how he or she teaches it. Similarly, Castro's (2004) study suggested that beliefs act as a filter and define what a teacher considers to be important or negligible information. Both of these studies also support the idea that more experienced teachers are less likely to change their belief systems than newer teachers because they are already set in their educational strategies: "the earlier a belief system is incorporated in the brain structure, the more difficult it is to alter" (Castro et al., 2004, p. 93). More research on teachers' beliefs discovered that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught when in high school. This is often why teachers use traditional approaches to teaching culture: "they primarily focus on passing on a fixed body of knowledge about a limited number of cultures, not worrying too much about whether this body of information is relevant to learners or can help forward their learning process" (Sercu et al., 2005, p. 494).

Another important factor as to why teachers struggle to cover culture in their classroom is that some feel the students do not possess the skills needed for deep cultural exploration. To ascertain the ability level of each student, teachers normally use a series of assessments for speaking, writing, listening, and reading comprehension. Through these assessments, they evaluate their students' proficiency. Castro (2004) stated, "some teachers may feel that learners (at the introductory level) do not possess the target language skills to explore, challenge, and confront perspectives and thus might overlook them to avoid sacrificing



communication in the target language” (p. 29). If they do not believe that their students are proficient enough to discuss certain topics, they will likely choose to not cover them.

Teachers also recognized their lack of time, suitable teaching materials, and training in this area when it came to cultural education (Castro et al., 2004). In this study of 35 Spanish teachers of English at the secondary school level, participants were all native speakers of Spanish, had Spanish nationality, and held a license to teach English at the secondary level. The purpose of this study was to find out what world language teachers’ current professional ideas were regarding the teaching of culture competence in world language education. Participants were interviewed and asked to explain their reasons for not teaching culture more often in their classes. The most common response mentioned was lack of time due to curriculum constraints, which they observed to be more focused on linguistics (Castro et al., 2004). They perceived that the attention to grammar left them with no time to teach culture and, for this reason, they decided to focus mainly on linguistic elements.

Along with the lack of time, teachers felt that they lacked suitable materials to teach culture (Castro et al., 2004). For example, in the Spanish L2 classroom, suitable materials could include, among others, authentic fairy tales, pictures, videos, songs, etc. which would be fairly easy to find. However, many teachers argue that it is still a challenge to find authentic resources because they feel that culture is an ever changing process that is “brought about by the participants in the culture as they live and work” (Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1987, p. 258). The information they teach can become outdated quickly, which could lead them to feel that it is a waste of time since culture will just change anyway.

Finally, these teachers also referred to their lack of preparation for teaching culture, mentioning that they tend to lack confidence in their own abilities. They felt that they were not trained well enough to teach culture. Drewelow and Mitchell (2015) commented on this idea: “teachers may not feel equipped with the proper knowledge and experience to determine relationships between those practices and products and the culture perspectives that gave rise to them” (p. 245).

Also in Drewelow and Mitchell’s (2015) study, the authors also examined learners’ rating of culture in relation to other concepts in Spanish courses and their justifications. Through a series of questionnaires, they asked high school L2 learners of Spanish to rank the 5 C’s of world language education (Communication, Communities, Culture, Connections, and Comparisons) in order of importance to them. The participants placed the Cultures standard in third position behind Communication and Communities. The authors concluded that these participants recognized the interrelatedness of language and culture but chose their rankings of the Culture standard based upon its utility in the context to their lives, specifically when travelling or studying abroad. They also found that most students already had their own perceptions of what culture is and its importance in the classroom. Some students believed that culture was only useful for language acquisition, for example: “they instrumentalized culture as a tool to understand practices (the why), but not really as one that promotes the discovery of alternative viewpoints” (Drewelow & Mitchell, 2015, p. 246). To the students in this study, culture was simply a tool to help acquire the language, not to broaden their perspectives. Similarly, Kramsch (1995) mentioned that “culture is incorporated only to the extent that it reinforces and enriches, not that it puts in question perspectives, traditional boundaries of self



and other, teachers teach language and culture, or culture in language, but not language as culture" (p. 89). Teachers use culture as an extra resource for the classroom instead of using it to broaden perspectives.

As I have not been able to find empirical studies concerning Spanish and cultural education, I will cite a study done about another language, but I believe that other studies about other languages could yield similar results. Acquiring an L2, regardless of which language it is, can also make students more open about learning new cultures and can break down stereotypes. In Tsou (2005), cultural instruction was implemented into one fifth and sixth grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Taiwan for a semester (treatment group) and then compared to another fifth and sixth grade class with no cultural instruction (control group). Tsou discovered that, for those in the treatment group, the students' language proficiency improved significantly along with their motivation for learning the language. In this study, the teachers highlighted the similarities between the Taiwanese and U.S. cultures to examine the relationship between students' attitudes and cultural stereotypes. The target culture was gradually introduced into the classroom to increase their awareness and ability to compare the two cultures, helping them to understand the target culture better. After the semester-long intervention, the researcher conducted interviews with the instructors and the students. One instructor said that:

Students in the culture groups became more motivated, participative, and cooperative. I could save more energy in teaching culture because students were more manageable in the culture groups (Tsou, 2005, p. 50).

This teacher also noticed that her students had a greater understanding of and interest in not only the target culture but also in their L1 culture. She expressed that the students in the

culture groups improved in their English abilities because they asked the teacher to repeat words and phrases all the time during instruction. Furthermore, she observed the students using the new English words in their everyday conversations.

As suggested by Tsou's (2005) study, cultural education can help students be more open-minded, stop spreading stereotypes, and be more accepting of the world around them. Similarly, Heusinkveld (1997) commented that educators are teaching culture in an overgeneralizing way, without stressing the importance of similarities between cultures. In the following section, I will discuss how it is possible to add more Culture and authentic experiences into the world language classroom.

### **Filling the Gap**

In the previous literature review, I have noticed a hole that my study could possibly help fill. There do not seem to be any studies related to Spanish and cultural instruction, so I believe that mine could serve as a launching point for encouraging future studies. It also combines grammar and culture to create a more feasible and balanced type of task for the classroom. To start, a few things can change in the classroom to aid in the effectiveness of cultural teaching. For example, many believe that students who were introduced to culture earlier on in their world language education are more empathetic to other cultural perspectives. For example, Seelye (1984) claimed that teachers wait too long to implement cultural lessons into their classrooms; most students do not receive any type of cultural education until they are almost finished with high school. Some of this research (e.g., Tsou, 2005) indicated that the most beneficial time for starting to learn a different culture is before the age of ten, because after



ten children already have preconceived notions and stereotypes of other cultures. Beyond the age of ten, people are less open to modification and are already set in their attitudes or beliefs.

One of the easiest ways to implement cultural lessons in the classroom is through the use of authentic materials (Shook, 1996). These are defined as “items or oral communications produced by members of a language and culture group for members of the same language and culture group” (Galloway, 1998, p. 133) that invite observation of a culture talking to itself, not to outsiders. Shook echoes Galloway in his emphasis on culturally authentic education as a goal for all world language teachers, and that experiencing cultural authenticity should be a goal for all world language students. One way to do so is by using authentic texts (i.e., poems, short stories, etc.) in the classroom when teaching grammar, vocabulary, or any other linguistic aspect, which gives learners combined linguistic and cultural input that feed into each other. Since they are written for L1 speakers/readers rather than L2 learners, they naturally provide an ideal vehicle that helps broaden perspectives. One stipulation with authentic texts is that the teacher must make a conscious effort to help diffuse any type of “mismatch that may occur in the interaction between the foreign language (FL) learner and the FL text” (Shook, 1996, p. 9). That is, there will be linguistic forms, cultural assumptions, and vocabulary in the authentic text that the students are unfamiliar with. This can fairly easily be overcome when teachers create appropriate tasks and scaffolding (i.e., a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process).

Although many educators usually skim the surface of cultural education, the best authentic resource that a teacher has is the language. The classroom is a perfect example of a

cultural setting. As stated by Brooks (1964), “language is the most typical, most representative, and the most central element in any culture” (p. 85). The most readily available authentic material that one can use in the classroom is the L2. When the target language is being taught, there are many questions to consider. For example, is this a formal or informal situation? What are the circumstances of this location? If a name is preceded by a title, what title should be used (e.g., in Spanish *Don/Doña*? What formulas of linguistic and cultural politeness appear e.g., in Spanish, the *tú form* [informal] or the *usted form* [formal])? All of these questions require one to know the cultural importance behind these linguistic structures. As Brooks (1968) stated, “they are not matters of language but of language users. As such, they are cultural, and rightly observed they can give a cultural dimension to every language class beginning with the first day” (p. 214). This creates a classroom atmosphere of cultural learning where students can explore the L2 cultural perspective.

This literature review has highlighted several SLA theories and methods ranging from the GT method to PBL. It also examines current research on cultural instruction in world language classrooms. The main conclusion that can be drawn from this literature review is that language and culture are interrelated and inseparable. Languages are best acquired by learning about the L2 cultures as well. It is clear through this literature review that Culture is becoming more popular in the world language classroom, although it is moving slowly. As theories and research continue, it is evident that students need more authentic experiences, resources, and tasks in order to delve deeper into Culture. The following methods section contains an example



of an authentic cultural experience where I attempted to see if students' perceptions about Spanish culture changed over time.

## **Methods**

I attempted to fill the gap by creating my own lesson plan that was focused on how students perceive cultural importance after being immersed in an authentic experience that balanced cultural education and grammar.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do students' attitudes toward the importance of culture change over time (from the first to the last survey), and if so, what does that change correlate with?
2. Does students' gender affect the way they view Spanish culture?
3. Is there a relationship between class standing and the way students view culture?
4. Is there a relationship between students' like/dislike of language and their attitudes toward the target culture?
5. Is there a relationship between students' past experiences/background in cultural education in high school and their perspectives on cultural importance now in college?

### **Participants**

This study includes three groups of participants ( $n=47$ ) who were Ball State undergraduate students studying Spanish at varied levels: Spanish 102 ( $n=8$ ), Spanish 201 ( $n=19$ ), and Spanish 202 ( $n=20$ ) in the fall of 2016. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the participants.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Participants

Variable	102(n=8)	201(n=19)	202(n=20)
<b>Gender:</b>			
Male	4(50%)	10(52.6%)	7 (35%)
Female	4(50%)	9(47.4%)	13(65%)
<b>Class standing:</b>			
Freshman	5(62.5%)	1(5.3%)	1(5%)
Sophomore	0(0%)	6(31.6%)	9(45%)
Junior	1(12.5%)	6(31.6%)	8(40%)
Senior	1(12.5%)	6(31.6%)	2(10%)
<b>Total years of Spanish taken:</b>			
4+	6(75%)	4(22.2%)	12(63.2%)
3	1(12.5%)	8(44.4%)	5(26.3%)
2	1(12.5%)	4(22.2%)	2(10.5%)
1	0(0%)	2(11.1%)	0(0%)
<b>Number of Spanish Classes taken at Ball State:</b>			
0 classes	4(50%)	2(10.5%)	2(10.5%)
1 Class	2(25%)	3(15.8%)	6(31.6%)
2 Classes	1(12.5%)	8(42.1%)	9(47.4%)
3 Classes	1(12.5%)	6(31.6%)	2(10.5%)

\*Not all percentages in a given cell reach 100% due to missing data.

### Data Collection Instrument

An online survey was used as the data collection instrument because it was the most efficient way to attempt to obtain a large enough sample size to answer the research questions. There were three online surveys (a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest) using Qualtrics software and comprising multiple-choice questions, open-ended response items, and Likert scale-items.



The survey questions follow the pattern of the lesson<sup>1</sup>. The pretest collected demographic information: class standing, number of Spanish classes taken, self-assessed Spanish ability level, major, and high school Spanish background. It also prompted the students to share their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs on the importance of culture and immigration. The purpose of this survey was to gather initial data about the students and their perspectives on immigration and culture.

The second survey (the immediate posttest) collected similar data (e.g., like/dislike of Spanish, importance of learning culture) and then focused on questions about the lesson itself: the diversity activity; the song *Somos Más Americanos* (*We Are More American*) by the Mexican band Los Tigres del Norte, written in 2001; a small portion of Mexican history; and the students' thoughts on immigration. For example, "how did the diversity activity help you to relate to your fellow students?" And, "did the song *Somos Más Americanos* alter your view on American identity?" The purpose of these questions was to find out if the students grasped the overall concepts from the lesson and if there were any differences in their perceptions about immigration and culture over time (since the pretest).

The final survey (the delayed posttest) was comprised of questions that required the students to think back to the day of the intervention one month prior, recall the information from the lesson, and share their perceptions on the importance of culture at that point in time. Some of the questions dealt with their perspectives about culture and immigration. The

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the rest of the methods section, *lesson* and *intervention* will be used interchangeably.

purpose of this survey was to see if the students retained the information from the lesson from the month prior and if it changed their perceptions.

### **The Intervention**

I gained support for this study from the professors of Spanish 102, 201, and 202 who allowed me to utilize one 50-minute class period to carry out my intervention. I also obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Ball State University to carry out the project. Dr. Lisa Kuriscak helped to facilitate the distribution of my surveys to the students in all three of the Spanish courses. I was also supported by the ASPIRE Grant Program, which funded the cost of incentives for those students who finished all three surveys. The three interventions and the completion of the first two surveys took place between September 29, 2017 (end of week 6) and October 13, 2017 (end of week 8). The delayed posttest happened one month later between October 27, 2017 (end of week 10) and November 10, 2017 (end of week 12).

At the beginning of the intervention, I introduced myself and briefly explained the purpose of the study to the students, then invited them to fill out the pretest in Qualtrics, which had been emailed to them shortly before class. If anyone chose not to answer it, the student was redirected to the Ball State Modern Languages and Classics department webpage. The survey took about five minutes to answer, and then the intervention itself began once they finished.

The first activity was the Diversity Activity, which consisted of a series of eleven statements written in Spanish, designed to help the students see the diversity among them. The statements required the students to either step forward or backward, representing moving forward or backward in life. The students started by standing next to each other in a horizontal



line, and if the statement pertained to the student, he or she moved as indicated. I read the statements aloud in Spanish. For example, “Si tus padres están separados o divorciados, pasa atrás” (*if your parents are divorced or separated, step backwards*).” If that statement pertained to the student, he or she should step backward; if not, he or she should not move. By the end of the activity, the students were in different places than where they had started. There was a short, guided reflection in English afterward in which they shared their thoughts and impressions of the activity. This activity last approximately ten minutes.

The next step of the intervention was the introduction of the song *Somos Más Americanos*. After giving a short introduction to the band and the song, I handed out the song lyrics for the noticing activity<sup>2</sup> so that the students could listen to it and “notice” a specific verb tense they had already reviewed in a prior class (predetermined based on their class level: Spanish 102 [present tense], 201 [past tense], and 202 [past tense]). After the students listened to the song, as a group, I cued them to identify which verbs they noticed. This part of the activity lasted approximately ten minutes.

There was a small-group element, continuing with the song activity. The students counted off by fives and assembled into groups. I then prompted each group, in Spanish, with a unique topic of investigation or reflection related to the song. They spent about eight minutes online (with their phones or laptops) investigating in their groups. The online searches were designed to broaden their perspective about current immigration issues. The investigations consisted of the following:

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<sup>2</sup> A noticing activity is a SLA concept proposed by Richard Schmidt in 1990. His hypothesis states that learners cannot learn the grammatical features of a language unless they first notice them. That is, they must be consciously registered by the learner first.

Two groups studied background information:

1. Investigate the themes of *Somos Más Americanos* and explain the meaning of the line “Yo no crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó” (I did not cross the border, the border crossed me).
2. Explain the background information about the line “nos quitaron ocho estados” (they took eight states from us): When did this happen? Which states were “taken”? What happened?

Two groups studied what people tend to believe about immigration:

3. Give reasons for stricter laws at the border.
4. Give reasons against stricter laws at the border.

The last group looked at a song similar to *Somos Más Americanos*:

5. Explore the lyrics of *Superman Es Ilegal* by Los Hermanos Ortiz. Choose 2-3 keywords that relate the two songs and choose a specific line to share with the class. Explain why you chose that line.

After the students discussed their findings in English, they shared their information with the whole class, mostly in Spanish, group by group. There was one final, brief, class discussion focusing on global immigration beyond that of the Mexico-U.S. border. The entire activity (i.e., song and reporting activities) took approximately 15 minutes.

The intervention closed with the immediate posttest (survey) that the students received via Qualtrics toward the end of the class period. One month later, I returned to each classroom to invite them to take a final (5 minute) survey, the delayed posttest.

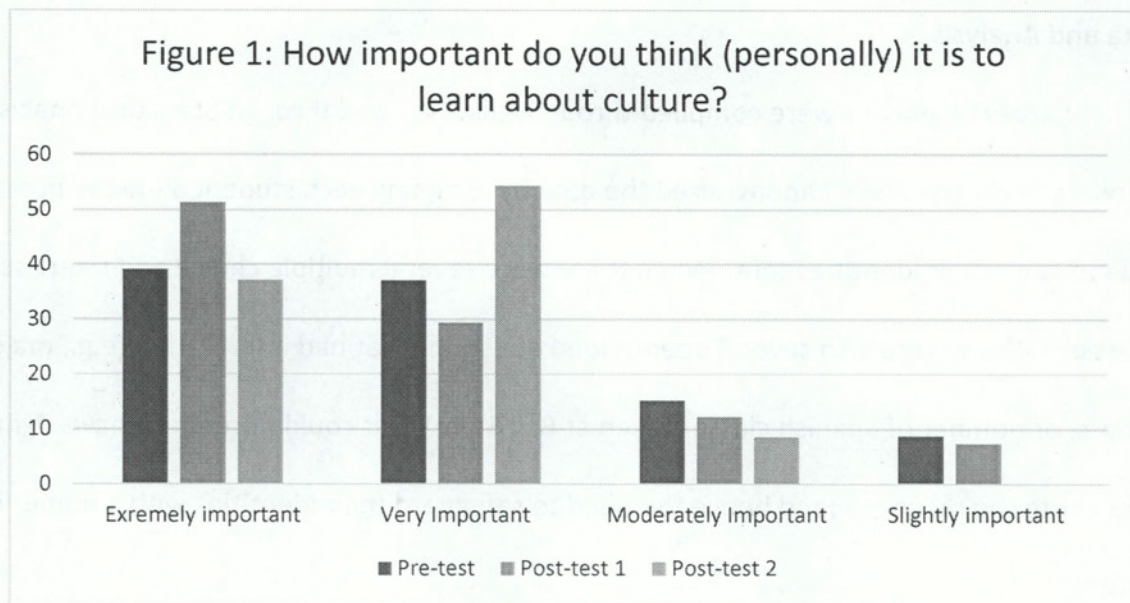


## **Data and Analysis**

Survey responses were compiled through Qualtrics, and through Statistical Analysis Software Package (SPSS). I anonymized the data by assigning each student a unique numeric code to keep their identities safe. While there were several multiple choice and Likert-scale questions, there were also several open-ended questions that had information (e.g., majors, minors, or number of Spanish classes taken at Ball State) that could potentially have signified who wrote the response (and hence the need to safeguard their identities with a numeric system).

## **Results**

Due to the small sample size, and notable missing data from the immediate and delayed posttests, I was unable to do inferential analyses. I instead relied on descriptive statistics, including means and cross-tabulations. Most of the data were inconclusive, but there were some small increases between the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest. The main purpose of this intervention was to find out if students' attitudes toward culture changed over time (in this case over a month's time.) As previously mentioned, there was not a conclusive response but a positive trend is apparent in Figure 1:



As shown in Figure 1, the pretest (the first bar) shows a wide range of responses; however, when one looks at the delayed posttest data (the third bar) there is a definite positive trend. Almost 60% of students said that it was very important to learn about culture in the third survey; whereas in the pretest about 40% of students believed learning about culture to be important. This data indicates a subtle positive shift in the students' perceptions of cultural importance.

The next question (Q2) had to do with whether gender affects cultural views. I cannot say that gender directly correlates with cultural viewpoints, but my data show that, consistently, more females said that the Spanish culture was important. Tables 2, 3, and 4 are cross-tabulations that show this information for the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest:



Table 2: How important do you think it is to learn about culture? (Pretest)

		What is your sex?			Total
		Male	Female	Prefer not to answer	
How important do you think it is to learn about culture?	Extremely important	7	11	0	18
	Very important	5	12	0	17
	Moderately important	5	1	1	7
	Slightly important	3	1	0	4
Total		20	25	1	46

Table 3: How important do you think it is to learn about culture? (Post 1)

		What is your sex?			Total
		Male	Female	Prefer not to answer	
How important do you think (personally) it is to learn about culture?	Extremely important	3	18	0	21
	Very important	7	5	0	12
	Moderately important	4	0	1	5
	Slightly important	2	1	0	3
Total		16	24	1	41

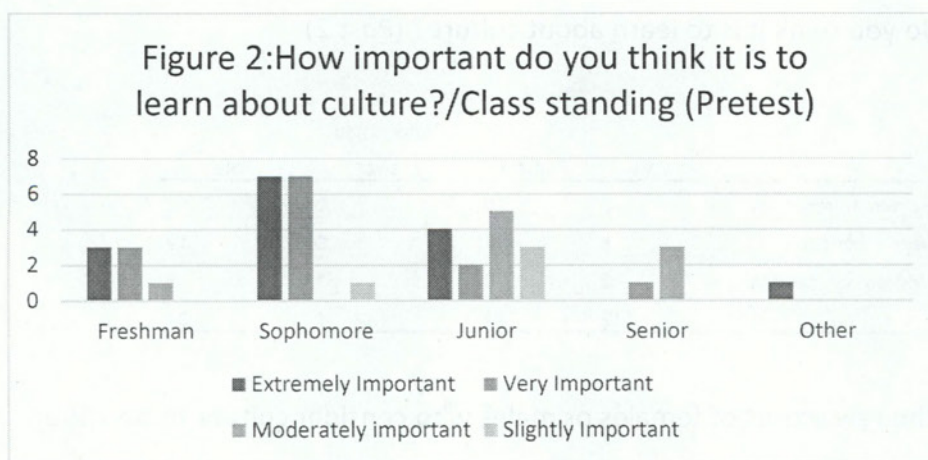
Table 4: How important do you think it is to learn about culture? (Post 2)

		What is your sex?			Total
		Male	Female	Prefer not to answer	
How important do you think (personally) it is to learn about culture?	Extremely important	2	10	0	12
	Very important	8	11	0	19
	Moderately important	2	0	1	3
Total		12	21	1	34

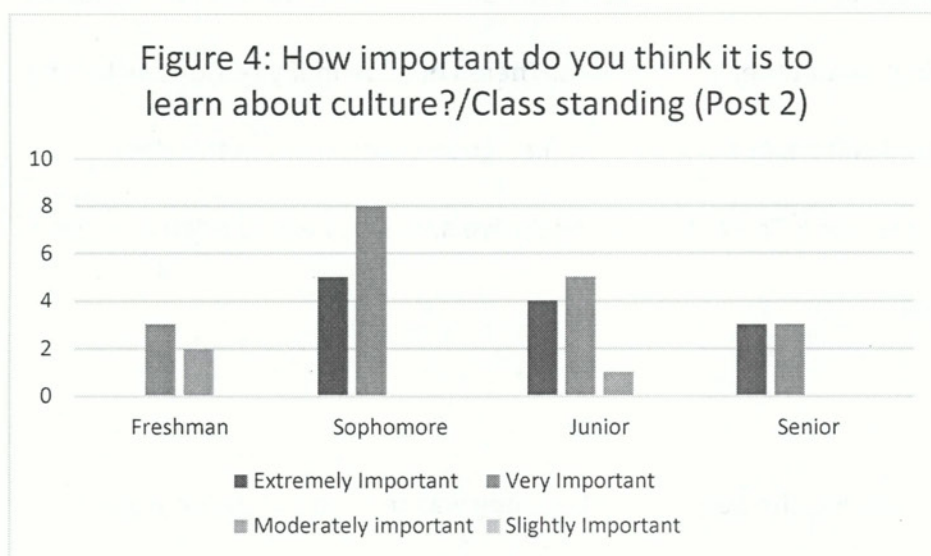
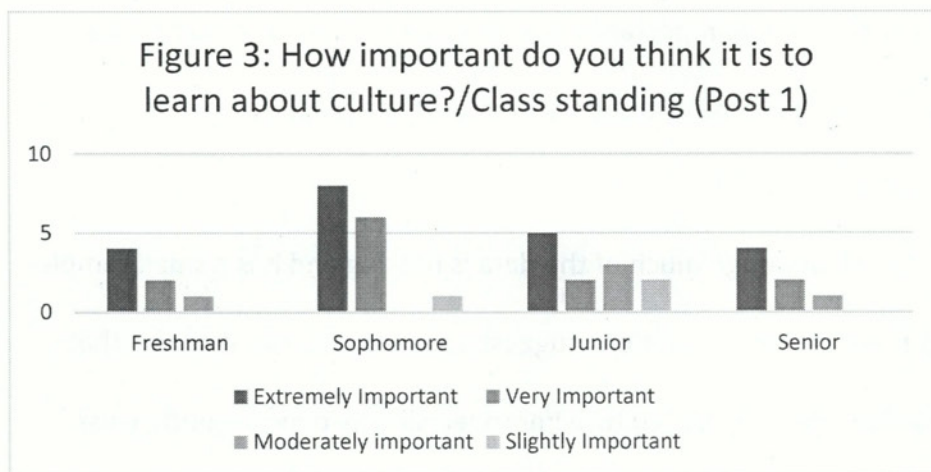
These numbers indicate the raw scores of females or males who consider culture to be either extremely important, very important, moderately important, or slightly important. In the pretest (Table 2), 11 females (44% of all females) said that culture was extremely important; whereas only 7 males (35% of all males) thought that culture was extremely important. Table 3 represents the raw scores of males and females who said that culture was either extremely,

very, moderately, or slightly important in the immediate posttest. In this data, 18 females (75% of all females) said that culture was extremely important, but this time only 3 males (19% of all males) said that it was extremely important. Table 4 represents data for the same item except this time for the delayed posttest. Here a total of 10 females (48% of all females) and 2 males (17% of all males) said that culture was extremely important. In all three cases, the females thought that it was more important to learn about culture than males did.

There does not seem to be a relationship between class standing and the way that students view culture (Q3). There is a wide range of responses throughout all three surveys. I wondered if maturity levels would have anything to do with cultural perspectives or views, but Figures 2, 3, and 4 show that the data are inconclusive (pretest, posttest 1, posttest 2, respectively):







The only real change happens in the delayed posttest data (Figure 4) where none of the students said that they thought culture was moderately or slightly important, whereas in the previous two surveys both sophomores and juniors believed culture to only be slightly important.

The data for the last two questions, (Q4 and Q5), which dealt with the relationship between students' like/dislike of language and their attitudes toward the target culture, and the relationship between students' past experiences/background in cultural education in high

school and their perspectives on cultural importance now in college, yielded no significant conclusions. There are no obvious patterns or trends from any of the graphs or cross-tabulations like the other data.

As previously mentioned, although much of the data is missing and it is a small sample size, I believe that my first three research questions suggest positive patterns. It seems that students' attitudes toward the importance of culture improved slightly over a month, class standing had no effect on their perceptions of culture, and gender did seem to have some effect on how they view culture. It is possible that the females in these specific Spanish classes were more open to learning about other perspectives. There could be many reasons as to why those female students found culture to be important (i.e., good experiences in the class, previous cultural experiences, etc.). To have more conclusive answers, I would need a larger, more complete sample size.

### **Conclusion**

Using three online surveys, the purpose of this study was to examine the change in students' perceptions and attitudes of Spanish cultures over time. Survey results were inconclusive and not generalizable due to a small sample size and missing data. However, the study is still informative because there is clearly a positive trend in the data, especially about students' perceptions over time and because of the synthesis of literature in the field that informed the design of the intervention. The most valuable piece of data I collected was related to gender, which shows that females tend to believe that learning about culture is more important than males do.



Due to the nature of an honors thesis, this study was limited to the students on Ball State University's campus. I only examined the change in perceptions about culture of undergraduate Spanish students at Ball State, so my sample size was limited to three small classes, with not completely reliable college students, and this project's conclusions are based on the data from only 47 participants. Therefore, no generalizable conclusions can be made about the change in students' perceptions and attitudes outside of Ball State. Another major limitation was the missing data in the last two surveys; because so many questions were left blank, it was impossible to draw meaningful conclusions from this data. If I were to repeat this study, I would have more carefully picked the days that the interventions were on. I chose to have the intervention for the SP 102 class on the day before Fall break, and I believe that this partially contributed to the small sample size. I also would have tried to be less Atlas-like. Although my students had opportunities to build their own learning, I provided them with the steps they needed. I would like to try to find another way to present the information so that it is not solely coming from me. This study does somewhat bridge the gap in the research by creating a more authentic classroom experience.

In the future, I hope to read more research on Spanish studies about SLA and cultural instruction. Future studies might focus on how other methods of cultural instruction affect students' perceptions on learning about culture and what aspects of instruction are more instrumental for females and for males. I believe with more in-depth studies we will have a clearer picture of what other variables might affect the way that students respond to culture in the classroom. I would like to imagine that future students who are exposed to a more culture-centered classroom will broaden their perceptions and attitudes about learning other cultures,

and in turn become more culturally tolerant as opposed to culturally bound; and that we, as a field of scholars and teachers, will maximize the potential of cultural instruction.



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## Appendix

### Somos más americanos

Ya me gritaron mil veces que me regrese a mi tierra,  
Porque aquí no quepo yo  
Quiero recordarle al gringo: Yo no cruce la frontera, la frontera me cruzó.  
América nació libre, el hombre la dividió.  
Ellos se pintaron la raya, para que yo la brincara y me llaman invasor es  
un error bien marcado nos quitaron ocho estados quien es aquí el invasor.  
Soy extranjero en mi tierra, y no vengo a darles guerra, soy hombre trabajador.

Y si no miente la historia, aquí se asentó en la gloria la poderosa nación  
entre guerreros valientes, indios de dos continentes, mezclados con español.  
Y si a los siglos nos vamos: somos más americanos,  
somos más americanos que el hijo del anglo-sajon.

Nos compraron sin dinero las aguas del rio bravo.  
Y nos quitaron a Texas, Nuevo México, Arizona y Colorado. También voló California y  
Nevada con Utah no se llenaron, el estado de Wyoming, también nos lo arrebataron  
Yo soy la sangre del indio  
Soy latino soy mestizo  
Somos de todos colores  
Y de todos los oficios  
Y si contamos los siglos  
Aunque le duela al vecino  
Somos más americanos  
Que todititos los gringos.

### We are more American

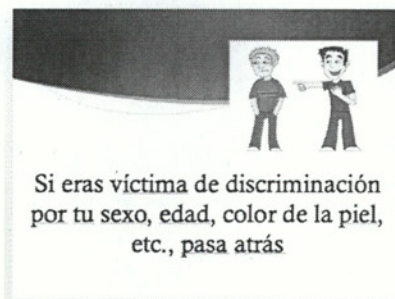
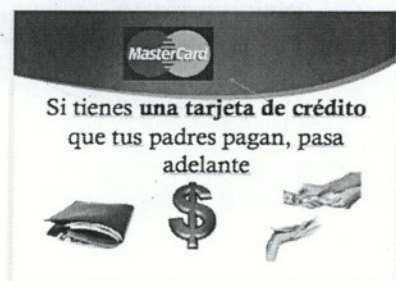
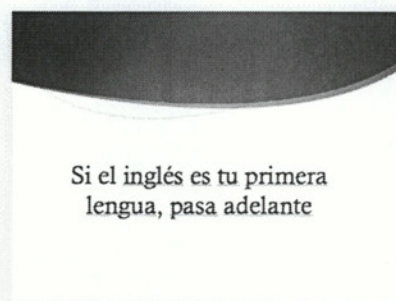
*They have shouted at me a thousand times I should go back to my country  
Because there's no room for me here  
I want to remind the gringos: I didn't cross the border, the border crossed to me  
America was born free, but men divided it  
They marked a line so that I jump it  
And they can call me "invader"  
And that's a very frequent mistake  
They took from us eight states  
Who's then the invader?  
I'm a foreigner in my own land  
And I didn't come here to cause you trouble  
I'm a hard-working man*



*And if history isn't lying  
 The powerful nation settled here, in the glory  
 Among brave warriors,  
 Indians of two continents mixed with Spaniards  
 And if we take centuries into account  
 We are more American  
 We are more American than the children of the Anglo-Saxons*

*They got from us without money the waters of the Río Grande  
 And they took from us Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado  
 Also California and Nevada were taken away  
 Utah was not enough, so they took Wyoming as well  
 I'm the blood of the Indian  
 I'm Latin American, I'm mestizo  
 We are made of all colors  
 And of all trades  
 And if we take into account centuries  
 Even if it hurts our neighbors  
 We are more American  
 Than all of the gringos*

#### Eleven statements pertaining to the Diversity Activity:



Si alguna vez en tu vida no  
tuviste seguro médico, pasa atrás



Si uno de tus padres se graduó  
de la universidad, pasa adelante



Si tu familia te apoya (te ayuda)  
mucho, pasa adelante



Si algunz vez no comiste porque  
en tu casa no había comido,  
pasa atrás



Si tienes miedo al caminar  
solo/a durante la noche,  
pasa atrás





Office of Research Integrity  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
2000 University Avenue  
Muncie, IN 47306-0155  
Phone: 765-285-5070

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DATE: October 24, 2016  
TO: Lori Stanfield  
FROM: Ball State University IRB  
RE: IRB protocol # 951743-2  
TITLE: Teaching culture in Spanish language classes  
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification  
  
ACTION: APPROVED  
DECISION DATE: October 24, 2016  
REVIEW TYPE: EXEMPT

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The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on October 24, 2016 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

**Exempt Categories:**

	<b>Category 1:</b> Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
	<b>Category 2:</b> Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
	<b>Category 3:</b> Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
	<b>Category 4:</b> Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.